



Ensuring a High-Quality Public Education: Montana's Revised Standards of Accreditation

FAQs

October 17, 2012

1. What are accreditation standards?

Accreditation standards are a set of basic standards for Montana schools to meet to ensure a consistent level of quality across the state. These are the rules Montana's public schools live by. The accreditation standards are adopted by the Board of Public Education and implemented under the leadership of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

These standards include: minimum graduation requirements for high school students, maximum class sizes for elementary, junior high and high school, basic program offerings and courses required, baseline policy requirements and school staffing requirements for principals, superintendents, librarians, counselors, etc.

State accreditation standards set the minimum expectations for schools. Many local school boards develop policy and local rules that exceed these minimum standards.

2. Which schools are accredited by the Board of Public Education?

In the 2011-2012 school year, there were 830 public schools and 14 non-public schools that are accredited by the Board of Public Education. Accredited non-public schools do not receive state funding as a result of being accredited. Most non-public schools seeking accreditation from the Board of Public Education do so to demonstrate they are meeting the same basic standards as public schools and to meet a Montana High School Association (MHSA) condition that requires state accreditation to participate in MHSA activities.

3. When was the last time the accreditation standards were fully reviewed?

The Accreditation Standards (Chapter 55) were last completely rewritten in 1989, and another significant rewrite of the standards was done in 2000. However, review of the standards is ongoing, and some of the standards were revised more recently. Examples of recent revisions include requiring trustees to adopt policies relating to bullying in 2006 and updating the rules on distance and online learning in 2007.

4. Why did Superintendent Juneau take on a review of the standards, and what direction did she provide in revising the standards?

Upon taking office, Superintendent Juneau met with many school superintendents and boards of trustees to get their input on the accreditation rules. Education leaders across the state responded the state's accreditation rules were too rigid to meet a modern educational context. She also heard that a school's performance should play a part in the accreditation process so data that demonstrates excellence could be taken into account as to whether a school is providing a quality education to its community and students.

Superintendent Juneau provided the following direction to her Deputy Superintendent and the Task Force for revising the standards:

- Review current rules and processes and ensure they work for Montana schools today.
- Consider a blended model of accreditation including a student performance component.
- Develop a system that provides more flexibility for schools when such schools demonstrate they continue to provide a high quality education.
- Develop and implement a framework for teacher and school leader evaluations.

5. Who worked on the recommendations presented to the Board of Public Education?

An open nomination process was used to appoint 30 members to a Task Force. Teachers from all school levels, parents, administrators, school board members and education program faculty from Montana's universities are represented on the Task Force. The Task Force met 14 times over a two-year period to study current rules in Montana, explore best practices from within Montana and from other states and develop recommendations to present to Superintendent Juneau.

Co-Chairs: Patty Myers, Chair of the Board of Public Education and Dennis Parman, Deputy Superintendent of the Office of Public Instruction

MEMBER NAMES AND CONSTITUENT GROUPS

Sharon Applegate, CSPAC	Leslie Weldon, School Trustees
Holly Bailey, School Administrators	Sue Brown, Secondary Teachers
Nancy Coopersmith, Office of Public Instruction	Bob Currie, MT Digital Academy
John Edwards, Board of Public Education	Marco Ferro, MEA-MFT
Mary Ellen Fitzgerald, County Superintendents	Jim Germann, School Administrators
Dee Hensley-Maclean, Montana PTA	Callie Langohr, School Administrators
Erin Lipkind, County Superintendents	Bill McCaw, Postsecondary Educators
Lance Melton, School Boards of Montana	Claudette Morton, Small Schools Alliance
Dave Puyear, MT Rural Education Assn.	Joe Rapkoch, School Administrators
Christina Rehbein, Elementary Teachers	Linda Reksten, School Administrators
Mike Reynolds, School Administrators	Mary Ruby, School Trustees
Darrell Rud, School Administrators	Corri Smith, MT Indian Education Assoc.
Chris Stout, School Administrators	Lorrie Tatsey, Secondary Teachers
Ruth Uecker, School Administrators	Tena Versland, School Administrators
Sandra Boham, MT Indian Education Assoc.	Orville Getz, School Administrators

6. What is the process and timeline for the adoption of new standards?

The 30-member Task Force made recommendations to Superintendent Juneau in April of 2012 and she made a recommendation to the Board of Public Education (BPE) at the May 2012 meeting. In May, the BPE instructed the OPI to prepare a notice of public hearing. The Legislative Fiscal Division was notified of the proposed rule and began a study of the potential fiscal impact on schools. In July, the BPE reviewed the Superintendent's recommended changes to the standards. The public hearing on the new standards was held in August. Final action by the BPE was taken at the regularly scheduled September meeting.

7. What is the timeline for implementation?

The standards take effect July 1, 2013, giving the OPI eight months to assist school districts in preparing for the effective date.

8. What are the major changes to the standards of accreditation?

- a) **Student Performance** – Previous standards ensured basic programming, staffing, and planning was in place. For the first time, the standards will also measure whether students are meeting reasonable levels of achievement in each school and graduation rates. [10.55.606]
- b) **Flexibility for schools with high student performance** – To promote innovation and provide flexibility, schools that demonstrate high performance may receive relief from assurance standards by applying for a "variance" to the standards through an application process. If a school demonstrates that it can reach the same or higher results without meeting the exact requirements of the standard, the Board of Public Education may approve a variance to the standard. Variances will be reviewed regularly to ensure the plan is working as intended. [10.55.604]
- c) **Supports for schools not meeting student performance standards** – Schools accredited "with advice" or "deficiency" will develop and implement a plan to address the issues that led to this status of accreditation (low test scores, large class sizes, low graduation rates, misassigned teachers, etc.) The OPI will provide support to assist schools in developing and implementing these plans. [10.55.605]
- d) **Safe learning environments** – The new standards expand the basic rule implemented in 2006 that simply stated schools must have an anti-bullying policy. The expanded rule spells out what bullying and cyber-bullying are, when the school is responsible for addressing bullying, and sets minimum standards for what must be included in a student protection policy, including procedures for reporting, investigating and responding to documented cases of bullying, intimidation and harassment. [10.55.719]
- e) **Evaluation of All Licensed School Employees** – Having high-quality, high-performing teachers and school leaders is critical to ensuring the success of our students. The BPE approved 10.55.701(4) requiring an "evaluation system" for "licensed staff. " This rule describes how often evaluation of non-tenured and tenured teachers, administrators and other licenses staff must occur, what general content must be included in the school district evaluation

instrument, requires that “both formative and summative” elements be included in the evaluation system, and include an assessment of the educator’s effectiveness in supporting every student in meeting “rigorous goals.”

- f) **Mentoring** – Mentoring programs provide support for teachers new to a school or district from established teachers who give them professional guidance and a strong start to their careers. The new rules require schools to establish mentoring and induction programs to assist licensed staff in meeting the new teaching standards. Schools have the flexibility to decide what kind of a mentoring program best meets the needs of the school district.
[10.55.701]

9. How does a school apply for a "variance" or flexibility within the standards?

Under the new rule, a school will prepare an application for a variance to a standard and explain how the staff will reach the same educational results or better results through a different or an innovative path.

10. What is used to measure student achievement in the performance-based part of the standards?

Test scores in Reading and Math for grades 3-8 and 10 and in Science in grades 4, 8, and 10 as well as high school graduation rates will be used in the student performance portion of the accreditation process to determine accreditation status. There will be 4 levels of performance. Level 1 is the highest level and Level 4 will be the lowest level.

	Math, Reading and Science Scores	Graduation Rates
Level 1	300 – 250	100% - 75%
Level 2	249 – 220	74.9% - 60%
Level 3	219 – 210	59.9% - 55%
Level 4	209 – 200	54.9% - 0%

11. Is the Board of Public Education recommending schools adopt a specific anti-bullying policy?

No. Each local board of trustees has discretion and control over the development of all its policies and procedures including student safety and school climate policies.

The OPI has developed model anti-bullying policies and procedures that schools are free to adopt or adapt.

12. Can a school lose its accreditation?

Yes, however it has not happened because most schools develop and implement a corrective plan that addresses their deficiencies.

Schools that have serious and/or continuing deviations are in "Deficiency" status and are expected to develop and implement a corrective plan to remedy the deviations that resulted in the Deficiency status. Schools failing to implement the corrective plan are placed in "Intensive Assistance." This process represents the final effort to resolve the school's significant accreditation issues. The school's lack of response to Intensive Assistance can result in a recommendation from the Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Board of Public Education (BPE) to move the school to Non-Accreditation status.

Section 20-9-344, MCA, gives the BPE the authority to withhold distribution of state equalization aid when the district fails to submit required reports or maintain accredited status.